



A Letter to Ade Murie

Kim Heacox

Writer-in-Residence 2012

(Kim Heacox biography blurb
and short list of published works.)

Dear Ade,

I miss you.

First, may I call you Ade? In the photos I see of you, white-haired on a high ridge in Mount McKinley National Park, a thousand feet or more above the Park Road, field glasses in hand, tundra underfoot, looking, always looking, you strike me as the kind of guy who'd say, "Sure, you can call me Ade. And what's your name?" Warm smile. Soft voice, almost musical. It seems odd, I know, since we never met. But many people today know you, or of you: travelers and teachers, scientists and students, scholars and conservationists, artists and politicians. If you only knew. Maybe you do. Living as you did, first as a visionary wildlife biologist, then author, and always a crusader for wildness and wild places, you did something remarkable. While Walt Disney pounded us with messages and images of "the big, bad wolf," you said just the opposite. You said wolves are beneficial to prey species; they cull out the old, sick and weak, and create a more robust, vibrant, magical landscape. You took risks. You spoke the unpopular truth. You lived with great intention and reached beyond your allotted time and created a legacy, a damn good one. That's how I know you.

Second, you always wanted this park to be larger than its original size as established in 1917. You wanted it to protect entire watersheds and the summer/winter home ranges of wildlife populations; you wanted an intact ecosystem. It happened in 1980, six years after you left us, with passage of a lands act that established more than 100 million acres of new Alaska national parks, preserves, monuments and wildlife refuges. Your park was tripled in size to six million acres and renamed Denali National Park and Preserve. It could happen only once, and did; it'll never happen again. We'll take what we can get, and be grateful every day.

Third, I hope you're comfortable with this. You're now called "the conscience of Denali." A heavy mantle, for sure. The American Heritage Dictionary defines "conscience" as "the faculty of recognizing the distinction between right and wrong in regard to one's own conduct." That can get confusing these days,

Artist-in-Residence Program

Selected competitively through an open call for entries each year, artists spend ten days in Denali. From their experiences, they each create art pieces to donate to the park collection. Opinions expressed may not be shared by the National Park Service.

Learn more at

www.nps.gov/dena/historyculture/arts-program.htm

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bombarded as we are by television and Twitter, Facebook and You Tube... things you never heard of. Just as well. Everybody's got an opinion. If they believe it enough, it's fact; if they shout it, it's truth. What they need is time on the tundra. Quiet reflection. Less noise. Fewer gadgets. A historian I know says you "exerted a force both spiritual and scientific" in the early development of this park. In other words, you gave us all something to admire and strive for. You changed the way we see the world.

And last, the cabin you so loved on the East Fork of the Toklat River, still stands. In winter, at twenty below, it's used by rangers on sled dog patrol. In summer, bathed in light, it's occupied by visiting scientists and artists- and writers-in-residence for inspiration. Sometimes bears, standing full height, scratch their backs on the weathered corners. From inside, you think it's an earthquake until you hear the low, satisfied sound of groaning.

It's September now. Getting cold. I'd write more but I'm drawn outside. The stars are out; the wolves are howling.

Thank you, Ade.

In gratitude,

Kim